

Manifesto

Tim Dobson



Foreword

Thank you for taking time to look at this Manifesto. It is the first that I have written, and probably one of the most difficult documents I have ever had to write, and for good reason. Unlike many of the other Candidates vying for your vote in this election, I do not have a Party position for each issue to use as a basis for my views. Indeed the Party leans neither left nor right in its ideology, but rather has a number of specific policy aims in a limited number of very important areas. The positions on the remaining areas such as Education, Justice, Health and Foreign Affairs are my own honestly held points of view.

This document presents my position on the issues that I feel are important, both to the people I hope to represent in this constituency, and to those I hope to serve in the country as a whole. It is not a document that is intended to be written once, and then left unchanged. But instead, one that I hope to build on in the future. It is intended to present my principles, rather than detailing how those principles translate into policy.

I believe that this country, its people, its values and its ideals are amongst the greatest in the world. However, this is not always as clear as it should be, either in our media or in our political discourse. The United Kingdom isn't 'broken', but there are areas where I feel the current Government is taking the wrong direction, or not standing up for what it should value. Although the country is no longer on the cusp of economic collapse, there were some very poor decisions made by the Government in the run up to the recent economic crisis, as a result of which there are now people suffering, who need not be.

It is clear that in this next Parliament, decisions must be made that will have a great impact on the United Kingdom well into the future. Everyone should have their views represented in the process of making those very difficult decisions. I feel that I could make a real difference in that process. What I am presenting to you, are simply some ideas to achieve a stronger, happier, safer and more prosperous society in the United Kingdom.



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Education

The performance of our education system is probably the most important factor in ensuring the UK's future. It is in our schools, colleges and universities that we provide our children with the skills that they will use throughout their lives. Education determines how well we do in all areas of the economy, it has an impact on innovation and the arts. In short, it shapes the future of the country, not over the period of a year, or an electoral cycle, but for generations. As someone with relatively recent experience of both the state, and private educational systems, I am in a privileged position to compare some of the policies and processes used in both.

I believe that a National Curriculum should say 'What' but not 'How'

Schools should have the freedom to choose the teaching methods and materials, that they feel are most effective to ensure that their students are well equipped to take their place in the world, once they have completed their education.

Exam results are important, but they are not the aim of education

Schools must aim to educate, not to simply pass exams. The number of examinations that young people sit should be reduced, and schools' performances should be judged on a broad range of indicators. Moreover, the examinations that young people do sit, should be appropriate to their aims and future development. Schools should not push students toward particular subjects or qualifications, for reasons other than the students' own wishes and ability. The public ranking of schools by GCSE or SATs results should be discontinued.

University tuition fees should be frozen, and eventually scrapped

I would vote against any increase in fees, and look for a fairer alternative. Tuition fees have a disproportionately negative effect on students from poorer backgrounds, and act as a barrier to intelligent and willing young people from developing themselves to their full academic potential. I believe that a freeze in tuition fees is necessary until a workable grant based, free or means tested alternative funding method could be agreed on and implemented. Given my positions in this area I have signed the National Union of Students 'Funding Our Future Pledge' and stand by it.

Teachers - not expensive software packages

Schools should have the freedom to spend their budgets as they see fit, and be encouraged to invest in knowledgeable, enthusiastic and well qualified teachers.

Over the last decade, we have seen vast sums wasted on expensive school IT systems, often with maintenance, software licensing and other unnecessary costs attached. To make matters worse, schools are then locked into these costly systems for long periods, thus reducing schools' abilities to keep up with new developments, and provide the best education for their students. An effort needs to be made to ensure that schools are aware of, and can collaborate on the use of free and open source software, which would save significant amounts of money within education. These savings could then be redirected back into better paid teaching staff.



Health

Observing the recent healthcare debates in the US have served as a stark reminder about just how well the UK does perform when it comes to healthcare. The sheer simplicity of the concept, and the benefits that the UK's National Health Service provides, are staggering, as a consequence my position on health is clear. I believe that the NHS's three core principles are absolutely correct, and that Government should ensure that the NHS is sufficiently well funded to ensure that those principles can be adhered to:

That it meets the needs of everyone

That it be free at the point of delivery

That it be based on clinical need, not ability to pay

Recently, there has been a drive to move elements of the NHS's administrative and support functions toward the private sector. This has been done with the best of intentions, to save money and provide more effective services. However, I do not believe that this has been the result.

The NHS should bring appropriate support services back 'in house'

I, and indeed the general public, trust the NHS to deliver services. We literally trust the NHS with our lives. In return for that trust, the NHS should ensure that it is using taxpayers' money as effectively as possible. It does not always mean paying less for something, but simply paying the least amount necessary, for the appropriate service.

NICE should not have to deal with costs, only clinical effectiveness.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence should not be placed in the position where cost is the driving factor in its decision making. When it comes to approving drugs, the only question that should be asked, is whether a drug is measurably more effective than existing treatments and whether it is appropriate to the patient's health. The cost of drugs should not be an issue. Under the current system and with the rapid advances in medical science, no taxpayer funded universal healthcare system can afford every new treatment as soon as it becomes available. However, a combination of patent reform, and research subsidies for the pharmaceutical companies, would reduce the cost of new drugs, thus making them more affordable.

Administration by administrators, medicine from medical staff

Given the complexity of running a hospital and the amount of time involved in administration, I believe that administrative staff, rather than being seen as a burden, are important. They ensure that doctors, nurses and other medical staff can focus on patient care. Whilst I think that NHS resources and spending must be scrutinised, it is important not to harm services by removing the administrative staff and shifting the burden to front line medical staff.

NHS should spend to save, focusing on preventative health care

Preventative care, and the provision of support to help reduce smoking, excessive drinking or eating and drug use should, I believe, be a core part of the NHS. If we can encourage people to make sound decisions about their personal health and well-being, we can not only save money within the NHS, but we will also have a healthier and happier community.

Drug abuse is a health issue, not a criminal justice issue

The abuse of illegal and legal drugs is a health issue, and it should be treated as such. Abusers of drugs should be provided with care, advice and assistance to prevent or reduce dependency, as well as support to ensure that they can operate effectively within society. For these reasons, and because the NHS largely deals with the negative consequences of substance abuse, it would make sense for the NHS to take the lead in both research and providing advice in all areas of drug policy, from the medicinal use of marijuana to the impact or dangers of new recreational drugs .



Justice

Justice is the cornerstone of our society. I believe that the right to due process, the right to a jury trial and judicial independence are all vitally important to the health of our society. Policing and the perception of the justice system are also crucially important. In a period of decreasing crime, it is astonishing to discover that people actually feel less safe than they have done in the past. I believe that by ensuring that justice is done for all, and seen to be done for all, confidence will be regained and people will feel more secure.

Maintain independence of the Judiciary, CPS and the Police

Politicians should pass the laws that they feel appropriate. However, the role of the Police, Judges and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) should be to act independently of Government. They should neither aim to influence, nor be swayed by political or popular pressures. I am firmly opposed to limiting the independence of judges, by curtailing their ability to pass judgement and sentence on the cases before them. The Police should prioritise on the basis of the needs of the Communities they serve. They should not be pushed to prioritise their resources or change the way they respond because of political pressure.

I would resist the politicisation of the Police

The election of Chief Constables would be a step backward for the British judicial system. Whilst I support the idea that those individuals entrusted with upholding and enforcing the law should be open to public scrutiny, I do not believe that they should be elected to their offices.

More Uniforms on the Street

The number of Police Officers should reflect the needs of the area in which they cover. However, every Police Force should have the resources to ensure that Police officers are both highly visible and locally available when they are needed. I believe that numbers of Police Community Support Officers and Police Officers should be sufficient in every force area to achieve this goal.

New technologies should not require new legislation

The UK has a large body of law. Yet it seems that frequently a new piece of legislation is introduced to cope with a situation that could be covered by existing legislation, albeit with a slightly different slant. I believe that all laws should be as clear as possible, that their implementation costs must be assessed as they are drafted, and that they should apply to a particular undesirable activity, regardless of the medium.



Transport

An effective, efficient and affordable Public Transport System is crucial to the well-being of a nation, economically and socially. It plays the important social role of ensuring that all members of society are able to travel as and when they need to, be it for work or pleasure. It is important to make public transport more appealing, and to increase the number of people who use it as their main form of transport.

A UK-wide integrated transport system

At present there are a number of great transport systems that are not as integrated as they could be. In addition to providing decent travel options, a good integrated public transportation system allows for cars to be removed from the road, lowering fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as traffic congestion, thus raising the quality of life for everyone.

I would push for more cooperation between the providers of transport services and aim to ensure that an integrated public transport system is the goal of all contracts made between national and local authorities and the transport service providers.

No expansion at Manchester Airport

I am opposed to any further expansion of Manchester airport, I believe that high speed intercity rail is what government should be pursuing, as it provides a way of reducing the number of flights around the UK each year.

Local and national concessions and contracts

I am very concerned to see that the private transport providers have managed to renegotiate contracts with local and national authorities in order to reduce losses and protect profits, when times have become tougher. This has led to poorer services to the communities that these providers serve. It is imperative that private companies that bid to provide public services should be held accountable for any breaches.



Defence

Defence of the realm is Parliament's primary responsibility, I believe that we must be able to meet our defence obligations to our overseas territories and allies. Whilst I am not in favour of so called pre-emptive defence or an aggressive defence posture, I realise that Britain must be ready to respond to aggression or threats to our way of life. I firmly believe that our Armed Forces must be well equipped with the appropriate equipment for the tasks we ask them to undertake, and trained for the roles in which they find themselves. British Armed Forces are rightly regarded as the best in the world, and we must ensure that we take care of them to the best of our ability and use them only when absolutely necessary. All members of the Armed Forces should be secure in the knowledge that the country will not desert them once they complete their terms of service.

Focus Spending on Conventional Forces.

I believe that whilst a limited nuclear deterrent is important, we should be focusing spending on our conventional forces, especially on forces that can be rapidly deployed. Airborne forces, infantry and other front line units should be the focus of our spending. As such I believe that any like for like replacement for Trident should be abandoned. Instead a reduced number of our current warhead stocks should have their life times extended, with a view to further reductions as other countries reduce the number of deliverable weapons they possess.

Ensure that we have the logistical capabilities to meet our obligations.

The United Kingdom must ensure that its logistical defence capabilities are sufficient to meet our obligations. Ensuring that the UK has sufficient independent air and sea-lift capacity is essential. It is important that, if necessary, we can operate independently of our US and EU allies.

Review and streamline the procurement process for military kit.

The UK needs to ensure that all of its defence procurement is focused on the UK or joint projects with our Allies. It is vitally important that costs are kept down and that delivery of weapons systems, vehicles, communications systems and other military procurement is punctual, and that the delivered product is appropriate to the defined need. We must ensure that our troops have what they need when they need it.



Energy & the Environment

Dealing with the multitude of environmental issues we face at present is a challenge that must be faced. Ensuring that we leave our children with a country and indeed a planet that they can enjoy is a high priority for me. Issues like climate change, air, sea and land pollution as well as rubbish disposal all pose challenges that the UK needs to address and address quickly.

The Polluter Pays.

I believe that if you damage the environment, it is your responsibility to pay for that damage to be reversed. The air around us, our waterways, our landscapes are all common property, if they are damaged through an accident or through activity that pollutes, then that damage should be fixed. The government has a duty to ensure that those that cause such damage pay to do so. In the event that damage is global, as with climate change, it is doubly important to ensure that damaging activities are kept to a minimum and that funds are raised to deal with the consequences. It is also vitally important that we invest in research and technology to reduce the amount of damage that we do to our environment in the first instance.

Investing in offshore wind & tidal power

Power generation will be a major issue facing the UK in the coming decade. The next government will have to push to get an effective and environmentally sound policy to deal with increasing generation capacity. I believe that the focus should be on renewable energy such as offshore wind and tidal power.

Making recycling a priority.

The UK is significantly behind some of its European partners when it comes to recycling, and the level of recycling in the various regions of the United Kingdom is by no means uniform. I think that we should focus on pressing councils to make recycling available across the country, and work hard to ensure that people are both aware of what is available and where they are able to have easy access to it.

Focus on affordable and efficient public transport.

A key way to reduce the level of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions within the United Kingdom is to ensure that public transport is available where it can be used effectively and where there is demand. I believe that a well coordinated and affordable public transport system is vital for us to meet our environmental aims.



Foreign Policy

Britain's relationship with the international community is key to both its economic success and its ability to influence other states. I think that it is important that we stand up for what we believe and do what we feel is best on the international stage.

Put Human Rights at the centre of UK Foreign Policy

I believe that human rights should be at the centre of all government foreign policy, and I see their protection as a core principle. As a principle it should be clear that they should not be compromised for the sake of expediency or profit, nor curtailed to create a perception of security or safety.

Absolute opposition to torture and mistreatment

The UK should at all times seek to ensure that it does not deal with governments that engage in torture.

The Iraq & Afghanistan Theatres of War.

I objected to both the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. In the case of Iraq, I feel that it was utterly unjustifiable on the basis of the evidence presented at the time and what has come to light since. With regard to Afghanistan I feel that whilst the regime was abhorrent, that in itself isn't sufficient reason for military intervention. Diplomatic alternatives to war were not pursued fully in either case, something that I feel strongly should always be done before resorting to the deployment of troops. We owe it to our military only to risk their lives when finally there is no alternative available.

In the short term I believe that the 150 remaining British troops in Iraq should be removed and our military involvement in that country terminated as soon as possible.

In Afghanistan I feel that the UK and its allies need to develop clear, concise and achievable goals and withdraw as soon as these have been met, and once the situation in the region is more stable.



Immigration & Asylum

Both immigration and asylum are emotive issues. However, I think that it would be wise and proper to avoid taking drastic action to reduce immigration, Neither should unacceptable barriers be placed in the way of legitimate asylum applicants.

There is the issue that immigration impacts on certain areas of the country disproportionately, causing issues with capacity planning for health, education and other public services, and this is an issue that should be addressed.

Well managed and controlled immigration

The demand for certain skills that are in short supply in the UK have made immigration vitally important for both the public and the private sector. I believe that well managed and well controlled immigration is important to ensure that the UK remains competitive and innovative. We need to ensure that immigration is well managed by keeping a close eye on who is entering and leaving the country. Without detailed information about the flow of people into and out of the country, it would become difficult to ensure that the areas where immigrants are settling were able to cope with both changes in the level of demand and changes in demographics.

Regionally weighted, points based immigration system

Immigration applications should be considered on the basis of what skills an immigrant brings to his sponsor, where the applicant is intending to live and work, and also whether an applicant is able to support themselves without any recourse to public funds. If an applicant's skills are in demand and not available, and they wish to move to a region where they can be accommodated and they are able to support themselves, then I believe the applicant should be accepted, initially temporarily and later on a permanent basis, if they settle and integrate into the society in which they live.

Efficient processing and proper treatment for asylum seekers

Quite rightly, the UK is party to international agreements pertaining to asylum. We have an obligation to provide sanctuary to those individuals who have been forced to flee their homes. We should ensure that those people who come to the UK seeking asylum are treated fairly and are given decisions quickly about their status. Once asylum seekers have been granted asylum they should be given assistance to integrate into their adopted country and be able to work if they wish.

Enforcing immigration legislation.

The UK should have a dedicated force comprised of specialists from the UK Borders Agency and British Transport Police with support from the Royal Navy, to police exit from and entry into the country at all points of entry and to deal with illegal entry. We should also vigorously pursue and prosecute employers who employ illegal immigrants.

northern rock



Economy

The economy is the biggest single issue facing the country today. Although the UK appears to be moving back into growth, I believe that the economy is still fragile and will continue to need public sector support, especially whilst the private sector is still weak and reorganising. Taking any rash action now, either by making overly aggressive cuts to public spending or pushing forward with drastic tax increases would endanger the recovery and do significant harm to those businesses and individuals who have already been most hit by the crisis.

There are however a number of steps that could be taken immediately to reduce government expenditure.

Reduce universal benefits for those earning more than £60,000

I believe that we have to try and target universal benefits like the winter fuel payment and child benefit more effectively, reducing payments for recipients who are earning more than £60,000 a year.

Once the economy has stabilised, the priority needs to move towards reducing the deficit and eventually paying off our national debt, I feel that the most effective way to achieve this would be to introduce a number of changes to the tax system that would be in place no longer than required to bring the UK's debt back under control.

Introduce a “Robin Hood Tax” on financial institutions

A tiny tax on stock market transactions would raise significant revenue and also act as a disincentive to engage in activities like high-frequency trading, to be effective it would have to be coordinated and agreed on internationally, but at present it has broad support.

**Scrap the 'upper' and 'additional' rates of income tax, replacing
them with a 50% tax on all earnings above £55,000**

Effectively increasing the upper rate of income tax by 10% whilst simultaneously taking middle income earners out of the higher bracket would reduce pressure on those in the lower part of the higher rate of income tax, whilst simultaneously increasing revenue.



Culture, Media, and Arts.

Britain has a vibrant, energetic and creative arts and media sector, one that is both culturally successful and economically so. Art and Media organisations also play key roles in our societies, often providing a focal point for young people and bringing established artists into contact with aspiring newcomers. I believe that fostering creativity and supporting the arts, both old and new, is vital. It protects our heritage and allows us to create what will be our children's heritage.

**Access to Britain's heritage should be made as easy as possible,
wherever possible.**

I believe that free access to Britain's collective cultural assets is important.

Collections like the sound archive of the British Library, a potentially valuable educational resource for the whole country, have heavily restricted public access.

These benefit 'academics', whilst shutting out ordinary people. Easy online access would benefit all of society.

**Government funded organisations should be set up to mentor the
next generation.**

Much good work has been done in nurturing young people with programmes like 'Creative Partnerships' placing artists in schools. But sadly, a gap exists between inspiring young people and helping them enter a sustainable career in the arts or sports.